

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00

PA-01 SP-02 /028 W

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FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9767

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

USCINCSO QUARRY HTS CZ

USIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 1311

EO 11652 GDS

TAGS: PINT, PBOR, HO, NU

SUBJECT: ARMED FORCES COMMUNIQUE CHARGES PRESS BIAS: ACCUSED NEWS-
PAPER REPLIES

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 1243 (DTG 101849Z MAR 78)

1. SUMMARY: IN A LENGTHY COMMUNIQUE DATED MARCH 13, THE ARMED FORCES
ACCUSED SAN PEDRO SULA DAILY TIEMPO OF AN INTENTIONAL CAMPAIGN TO
DISCREDIT THEM, AND CITES TWO NEWS ITEMS IN SUPPORT OF THIS CLAIM.
TIEMPO, IN A FULL FRONTPAGE, SPIRITED REPLY, DENIES THESE CHARGES,
(ALTHOUGH ADMITTING IN ONE CASE ITS STORY HAD PROVED FALSE), AND
ASKS WHY PRESS FREEDOM IS BEING ATTACHED AT THIS MOMENT. COMMUNIQUE
FOLLOWS PREVIOUS MILITARY COMPLAINTS (REFTEL) OF PRESS SENSATION-
ALISM AND INDICATES CONTINUING CONCERN OVER RECENT REVELATIONS. IT
SEEMS, HOWEVER, A CLUXSY AND PROBABLY COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE
WAY TO EXPRESS ANNOYANCE. END SUMMARY

2. ON MARCH 9, TIEMPO PUBLISHED A SHORT ARTICLE STATING THAT
JOSE RAUL MATA MARTINEZ (APPARENTLY A RELATIVE OF THE
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RAMON MATA BALLESTEROS IDENTIFIED BY GENERAL PAZ AS A LEADING
HONDURAN DRUG TRAFFICKER) WHO WAS WANTED FOR QUESTIONING IN
ATTEMPTED MURDER OF CARLOS FELIPE MADRID HAD TURNED HIMSELF IN
TO THE SEVENTH BATTALION AND THEN BEEN SHOT IN A COVER-UP ATTEMPT.
ON MARCH 11, TIEMPO PUBLISHED A LETTER DATED NOVEMBER 9, 1977,
GIVEN IT BY THE HONDURAN COMMITTEE FOR SOLIDARITY WITH THE
NICARAGUAN PEOPLE. LETTER ALLEGEDLY WAS WRITTEN BY NATIONAL

GUARD CAPTAIN DAVID BABZ AT THE LOS MANOS BORDER CROSSING TO THE DEPARTMENTAL COMMANDER IN OCOTAL, DESCRIBING THE CUSTOMS COURTESIES EXTENDED TO A HONDURAN ARMY LIEUTENANT WILFREDO MEZA WHO WAS ON HIS WAY TO GUARD HEADQUARTERS IN OCOTAL TO DISCUSS "MATTERS RELATED TO THE JOINT OPERATION OF WHICH YOU ARE AWARE." APPARENTLY LETTER WAS WRITTEN BY LOS MANOS OFFICER AFTER HE WAS REPRIMANDED FOR LETTING LT. MEZA THROUGH WITHOUT INSPECTION. (COMMENT: IT SEEMS REASONABLE TO ASSUME LETTER CAME INTO POSSESSION OF THE SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE AFTER FSLN ACTIVITIES IN OCOTAL AREA IN DECEMBER.)

3. ARMED FORCES COMMUNIQUE NO. 35, FRONT-PAGED BY TIEMPO MARCH 14 UNDER HEADLINE READING "UNHEARD OF ATTACK OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION," CLAIMS THAT "EVIDENCE EXISTS OF THE FALSE CAMPAIGN UNDERTAKEN BY TIEMPO AGAINST THE ARMED FORCES" AND THAT IT CONSTITUTES AN ABUSE OF THE UNRESTRICTED FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN HONDURAS GUARANTEED BY THE ARMED FORCES GOVERNMENT. COMMUNIQUE STATES THAT THIS SITUATION WORRIES THE ARMED FORCES COMMAND BECAUSE THE REASONS TIEMPO'S EDITORS ARE DOING THIS ARE UNKNOWN. IT THEN CITES THE TWO INCIDENTS DESCRIBED IN PARA 2 ABOVE, NOTING THAT RAUL MATA HAS NOT TURNED HIMSELF INTO ANY MILITARY UNIT OR BEEN CAPTURED AND POINTED OUT THAT THE ALLEGED LETTER WAS WRITTEN FOUR MONTHS BEFORE OPERACION VELOZ "WAS PLANNED AND EXECUTED". COMMUNIQUE THEN DENIES AGAIN THAT HONDURAS AND NICARAGUA ARE CARRYING OUT A JOINT EFFORT.

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4. RESPONDING, ALSO ON THE FRONT PAGE, TIEMPO DENIES EMPHATICALLY THAT IT HAS UNDERTAKEN A CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE ARMED FORCES AND MAINTAINS THAT PUBLISHING INFORMATION ON CURRENT EVENTS IS FULFILLING ITS OBLIGATION TO THE PUBLIC. TIEMPO DOES EXPRESS REGRET THAT IT PUBLISHED A REPORT, WHICH IT HAD PICKED UP FROM RADIO STATIONS, THAT TURNED OUT TO BE FALSE BUT NOTES THAT IT ALSO PUBLISHED THE ARMED FORCES PROTESTS AND DENIALS. THE PAPER ASKS WHY HAS THE ARMED FORCES CHOSEN THIS MOMENT AND TIEMPO FOR AN ATTACK ON PRESS FREEDOM. IT REJECTS THE COMPLAINT ABOUT THE "OPERACION VELOZ" LETTER NOTING THAT PUBLICATION OF THE LETTER GIVEN IT BY A PUBLICLY IDENTIFIED ORGANIZATION IS "WITHIN THE STRICTEST NORMS OF NEWSPAPER ETHICS ALTHOUGH IT DOES ACCEPT DENIAL. TIEMPO CLOSES BY STATING THAT AS LONG AS THERE IS FREEDOM IT WILL USE IT BUT WHEN THAT FREEDOM DISAPPEARS, AS HAS OFTEN HAPPENED IN HONDURAS, "WE WILL EITHER BE CLOSED OR WE WILL STOP APPEARING. BECAUSE TIEMPO CAN ONLY BE BOUGHT FOR TWENTY CENTS" (I.E. ITS NEWSTAND PRICE, BUT NOT BY THREATS OR INTIMIDATION).

5. COMMENT: THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNIQUE FOLLOWS COMPLAINTS BY GENERAL POLICARPO PAZ AND G-2 LT COL LEONIDAS TORRES ARIAS THAT PRESS HANDLING OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS RELATING TO POSSIBLE MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN DISAPPEARANCES, MURDER, DRUG TRAFFICKING AND

CORRUPTION WAS SENSATIONAL AND SLANTED TO DISCREDIT THE ARMED FORCES. IT IS TRUE THAT THE PRESS HAS HANDLED THESE REVELATIONS IN A SENSATIONAL MANNER. BUT IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT THEY ARE SENSATIONAL AND RAISE NUMEROUS QUESTIONS THAT HAVE NOT YET BEEN ANSWERED. THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNIQUE REFLECTS CONTINUING CONCERN OVER THESE DEVELOPMENTS. HOWEVER, ITS NOT SO THINLY-VEILED THREATS AGAINST THE PRESS SEEM A CLUMSY AND PROBABLY COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE WAY OF MANIFESTING THAT CONCERN. TIEMPO'S REACTION RECOGNIZES THAT THREAT AND CHALLENGES THE GOVERNMENT TO CARRY IT OUT. WHAT IS STILL MISSING, OF COURSE, IS A GOVERNMENT COMMUNIQUE DESCRIBING RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATIONS GENERAL PAZ SAID WERE UNDERWAY. JARAMILLO

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